

### DEIS and DSEIS Public Comment Period

NMFS intends to file the DSEIS and DEIS with the Environmental Protection Agency to initiate a 45-day public comment period pursuant to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, prior to the Council's public hearings.

### Public Hearings

The hearings will begin at 6 p.m. and will end when all business is completed. The dates and locations are scheduled as follows:

1. Monday, June 15, 1998--Ponce de Leon Resort, 4000 U.S. Highway 1, North, St. Augustine, FL; telephone: 904-924-2821;
2. Monday, June 22, 1998--Town & Country, 2008 Savannah Highway, Charleston, SC; telephone: 843-571-1000;
3. Tuesday, June 23, 1998--Carteret Community College, 3505 Arendell Street, Morehead City, NC; telephone: 919-247-3094;
4. Wednesday, June 24, 1998--Holiday Inn, Highway 17 South at I-95, Richmond Hill (near Savannah), GA; telephone: 912-756-3351;
5. Thursday, June 25, 1998--Holiday Inn, 7151 Okeechobee Road, Ft. Pierce, FL; telephone: 561-464-5000;
6. Friday, June 26, 1998--Hawk's Cay Resort, Mile Marker 61, Marathon, FL; telephone: 305-743-7000.

### Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to the Council office (see ADDRESSES) by June 9, 1998.

Dated: May 28, 1998.

**George H. Darcy,**

*Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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### DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

#### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

#### 50 CFR Part 660

[I.D. 052098C]

RIN 0648-AK21

#### Fisheries Off West Coast States and in the Western Pacific; Bottomfish and Seamount Groundfish Fisheries; Draft Amendment 5

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice of availability of a draft amendment to a fishery management plan; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) is seeking comments on Draft Amendment 5 to the Fishery Management Plan for Bottomfish and Seamount Groundfish of the Western Pacific Region (FMP).

**DATES:** Comments on Draft Amendment 5 must be received by the Council office no later than July 20, 1998.

**ADDRESSES:** Written comments should be sent to, and copies of Draft Amendment 5 are available from, the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, 1164 Bishop St., Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI 96813.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Kitty M. Simonds, Executive Director; 808-522-8220.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The Council is seeking comments on Draft

Amendment 5 to the FMP, which would establish a limited access program for the Mau Zone bottomfish fishery in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI). The Mau Zone limited access program is intended to address the low economic returns in the fishery, the potential for excessive harvest capacity, and other conservation and economic concerns.

Draft Amendment 5 would specify a target number of vessels for the fishery; establish qualifying criteria for allocation of initial limited access permits based on historical and current landings; impose permit holder restrictions; establish a use-it-or-lose-it requirement for permit renewal; prohibit the transfer, lease, charter, and sale of permits to reduce the number of vessels in the fishery to the target number; direct the Council to assess periodically how effectively the limited access program meets the objectives of the FMP; and establish criteria to allow new entrants into the Mau Zone when the number of vessels falls below the target number specified for the fishery.

Since March 1997, there has been a 2-year moratorium on the issuance of new permits for harvesting bottomfish in the Mau Zone so that effort in the fishery can be stabilized while the Council develops a long-term limited access program (see the final rule published in the February 26, 1997, issue of the **Federal Register** at 62 FR 8637). The moratorium expires on March 27, 1999, at which time proposed Amendment 5 is expected to be implemented. The Council will be taking action on draft Amendment 5 at its 97th meeting to be held in July in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii.

**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: May 28, 1998.

**Bruce C. Morehead,**

*Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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